

CHAPTER 19: PUBLIC HEALTH

The vision of the Fort Worth Public Health Department (FWPHD) is to make Fort Worth the healthiest city in Texas. The FWPHD demonstrates a contemporary model of public health by maintaining traditional enforcement activities, such as consumer health and animal control, while also promoting innovative population-based health programs to promote prevention through education. The FWPHD is designed to serve residents through five program areas: the Epidemiology and Assessment Division, the Consumer Health Division, the Outreach Division, the Animal Care and Control Division, and the Health Promotion and Education Section.

EXISTING CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

The Community Needs Assessment (CNA) provides the FWPHD with information on behaviors that affect the community's health and the perceived health needs of Fort Worth residents. This unique assessment provides a statistically reliable profile of perceived health problems and social issues at the neighborhood level. This assessment is conducted every five years, with the inaugural survey in 1998. The most recent survey was completed in 2003.

CNA data is used to drive the department's programs and interventions by measuring progress, identifying issues important to citizens, and by prioritizing community needs. The 2003 survey identified the three greatest health problems in Fort Worth households as allergies, diabetes and hypertension. The following sections provide a brief description of existing public health issues identified through public input, divisional activities and the CNA.

Access to Health Insurance

Lack of health insurance affects the ability of individuals to get preventive and diagnostic health treatment. In 2003, the CNA indicated that 24 percent of the respondents did not have health insurance. Many of the uninsured are from working families with low to moderate incomes who do not have access to benefits through their job or who cannot afford insurance premiums.

Animal-Related Community Health Problems

Overpopulation: More than 20,000 homeless animals are impounded at the Fort Worth Animal Care and Control Center each year. Subsequently, about 70 percent of impounded animals have to be destroyed due to insufficient adoption rates and lack of space for ongoing influx of strays. Sterilization of animals is strongly advocated as a means to control the pet overpopulation problem.

Rabies: Rabies poses a significant risk to humans since much of the domestic pet population is unvaccinated. It is estimated that fewer than 20 percent of the 270,000 pets in the Fort Worth area are vaccinated for rabies. The rabies vaccination, which state law requires every three years for adult dogs, cats and ferrets, provides a preventive barrier between humans and the disease in wildlife.

Future Fort Worth Public Health Center



Fort Worth Public Health Center will move from University Drive to a site within the Evans and Rosedale Village. (Source: Public Health Department, 2005.)

Animal Licensing: Overall, compliance with the City's licensing ordinance is estimated at about five percent. A license is required annually for all dogs and cats within city limits. The city license is not only a pet's ticket home if lost, but it also assists bite investigators by identifying animals who have been vaccinated.

Animal Bites: Animal bites have become a concern for many residents, with nearly three bites reported within the city each day. There are more than 1,000 animal bites to humans reported in Fort Worth each year. However, due to lack of reporting, the actual number of bites is likely to be much higher.

Bioterrorism Preparedness

As a result of September 11 and subsequent anthrax attacks, public health has become a prominent component of homeland security activities. According to the 2003 CNA, 27 percent of respondents stated they were worried to extremely worried that a terrorist attack would occur in Fort Worth. Moreover, only 59 percent of respondents reported that they have adequate information to prepare and respond to an emergency and only 34 percent said they have an emergency supply kit.

Child Injury

Child Safety Seats: Children placed in improperly installed car seats can be in as much danger as those not restrained at all. During child car seat checks in Fort Worth each year, more than 80 percent of seats are improperly installed. A recent study found that every dollar spent on child car seats saves \$30 in direct health care costs.

Bicycle Helmets: Bicycle accidents are also an important public health issue. Every year, bike accidents kill about 200 children and injure more than 350,000.

Water Safety: Each year, an average of six people, mostly children, drown in Tarrant County. This indicates a need to help children understand the dangers of water and to help parents understand the importance of constant supervision when around swimming pools or any body of water.

Chronic Disease

Asthma: In the 2003 CNA, 16 percent of respondents reported that someone in their household suffered from asthma. According to the Texas Bureau of Vital Statistics, asthma caused the deaths of 249 persons in Texas in 2003, including nine deaths in Fort Worth. Asthma attacks can cause a loss of productivity among adult sufferers. It can also disrupt daily family life by causing asthmatic children to miss school, which in turn leads to lost work time for parents. Moreover, asthma attacks often lead to emergency room visits.

Hypertension: High blood pressure contributes significantly to the risk of heart disease and stroke, and damages the heart, brain, kidneys and other vital organs. In the 2003 CNA, 30 percent of respondents specified hypertension as a health problem in their household. In 2003, hypertension was linked to 2,756 deaths in Texas, including 106 in Fort Worth.

Preventing Injury



Preventing injuries to children through the distribution of child safety seats and bicycle helmets is one of the important activities provided by the Fort Worth Public Health Department. (Source: Public Health Image Library, 2006).

Diabetes: Senior citizens and minority populations named diabetes and associated complications as one of their top three health concerns in the 2003 CNA survey. Nearly 16 percent of respondents reported that at least one person in their household had diabetes. In 2003, diabetes was the cause of death for 5,663 Texans, including 161 deaths in Fort Worth.

Development Patterns and Public Health

The pattern of land development shapes travel choices and impacts public health. In 2003, a study in the *American Journal of Health Promotion* concluded that there is a significant correlation between development patterns and public health. People who live in isolated, automobile-dependent neighborhoods are more likely to walk less and suffer from obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, and other diseases. Conversely, people who live in more connected, mixed-use, compact communities are less likely to suffer these health problems. To support healthier communities, the Comprehensive Plan encourages the development of mixed-use growth centers and urban villages. These areas, described in detail in Chapter 4: Land Use, should help minimize the risk of health problems related to conventional suburban development.

Food-Borne Illnesses

According to the Texas Department of Health, salmonella and other food-borne illnesses are increasing in Texas. Eighty-nine cases of salmonella were reported in Tarrant County in 2004, which is up from 24 in 2003. During the 2005 fiscal year, the Consumer Health Division of the Fort Worth Public Health Department will respond to more than 800 complaints involving permitted facilities.

Mental Health Care

Following the Wedgwood Church shooting in 1999, there has been considerable attention focused on the adequacy of mental health services in Tarrant County. Mental Health and Mental Retardation of Tarrant County estimates that 72 percent of mental health patients are not receiving needed services. Moreover, the organization also states that 85 percent of substance addicts and 19 percent of children requiring early interventions are not being served in Tarrant County.

Mosquito-borne Disease

Since its initial appearance in the United States in New York in 1999, West Nile virus (WNV) has traveled westward across the US. The virus was first identified in Texas in June 2002. During 2004, Texas had 119 reported cases of WNV in humans (5 occurring in Tarrant County). Also, during that time, more than 160 WNV cases were reported in horses, 423 reported in mosquitoes, and 490 in birds.

Nutrition and Obesity

The 2003 CNA indicated that 27 percent of Fort Worth families believed that obesity is a problem in their household. Consistently, 29 percent of Fort Worth residents reported never exercising. However, of those who did exercise, only 72 percent did so at least three times per week. With respect to diets, 27 percent of respondents stated that they eat high-fat foods at least four times a week and 87 percent ate less than five of the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables a day.

Protecting Residents from Food-Borne Illnesses



Consumer Health Inspectors work to make sure customers are safe from food-borne illnesses. (Source: Public Health Department, 2002.)

Prenatal Care

Prenatal care is an important factor in the health of mothers and their unborn children. Lack of prenatal care has been highly correlated to increased infant mortality rates. The Texas Bureau of Vital Statistics and Fort Worth Vital Records indicate that the infant mortality rate for the City of Fort Worth in 2003 was 8.7 per 1,000 live births, which is up from 7.5 during the previous year, and still higher than rates for other Texas cities. Potential causes for lack of prenatal care include inadequate knowledge regarding where to get care, inability to pay for care, and an unwillingness or inability of pregnant women to seek needed care.

Challenges

Collaborative partnerships between various service providers play an important role in delivering the high level of health care and health advocacy that citizens deserve. No single health provider can effectively serve the health needs of all community members. Often, response to critical health issues is disjointed and fragmented, resulting in ineffective and inefficient use of area resources. Building a comprehensive collaborative response between various service providers is a continuous challenge. In order to continue to build positive relationships, the FWPHD has begun an initiative based on the National Public Health Performance Standards to identify and prioritize community health issues. Other public health challenges include bioterrorism, a fast-growing population, health disparities and the pet overpopulation problem.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following are goals and objectives specified in the FWPHD's FY 2005-2006 Business Plan:

Address the City's mission of providing a safe and healthy community.

- Conduct 9,750 Consumer Health inspections.
- Complete 47,000 animal care and control service calls.
- Save 27 percent of impounded animals through adoption, reclaim or rescue.
- Increase the number of licensed animals to 7 percent.

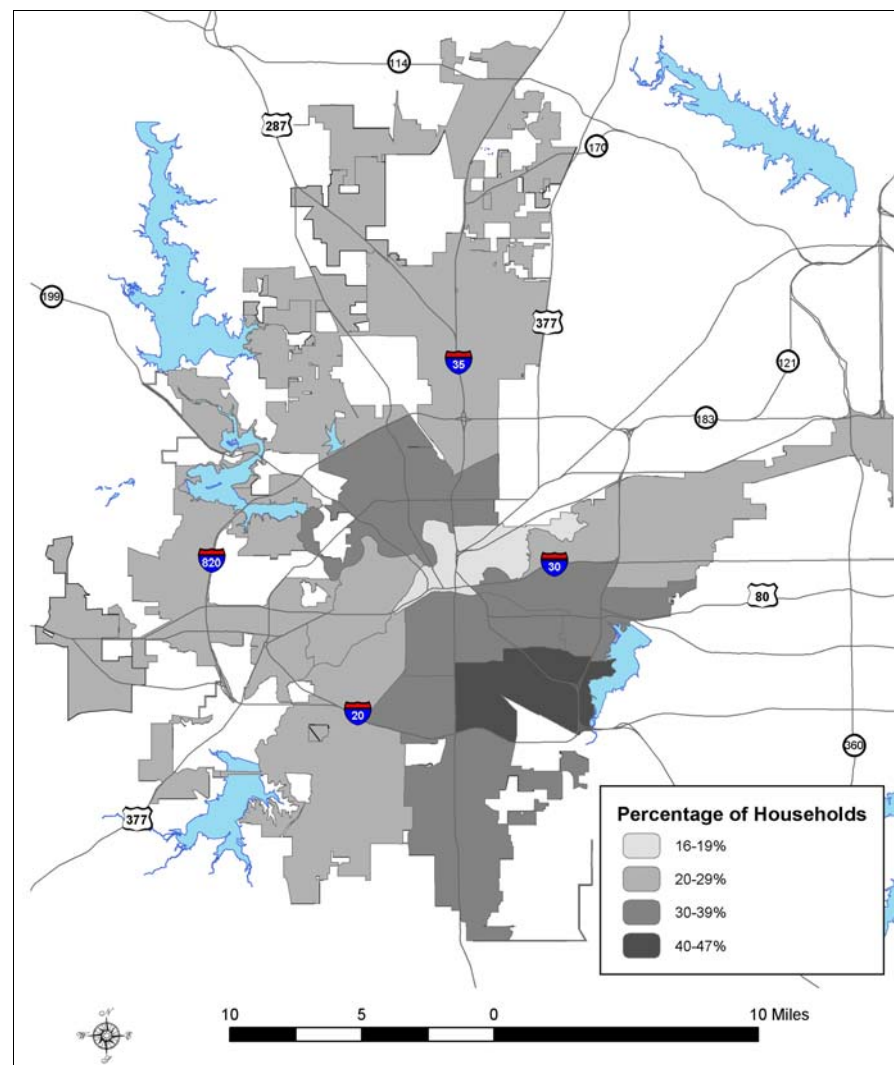
Inform, educate and empower the community with respect to health issues.

- Educate 84,500 residents through FWPHD programs.
- Make 1,500 external and 800 internal referrals to service providers.
- Generate 480 stories using the mass media to promote programming and conduct 36 percent of media stories in Spanish.

Monitor the health status in the community to identify health problems by increasing the number of citizen contacts.

- Conduct 3,306 community assessment interviews.
- Issue 225 special reports about current or past health issues.
- Achieve an overall average of 95 percent satisfactory rating for services.

Household Prevalence of High Blood Pressure by Neighborhood Policing District



The map above shows the percentage of households that have at least one person who has high blood pressure. (Source: Community Needs Assessment, Public Health Department, 2003.)

POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

The following policy and strategies will enable the FWPHD to implement its goals and objectives:

Current Policy

- Reach out to neighborhoods to educate residents about public health issues, provide them with the information they need to make educated decisions to solve public health problems in their community, and refer residents to needed health and social services.

Recommended Strategies

In order for the department to remain on track with established policy, the following strategies are recommended:

- Continue to collaborate with community partners, stakeholders and other providers to assess and agree on priority health issues, and focus resources to address those issues on an ongoing basis.
- Seek alternative funding sources to further address and reduce health risks.
- Provide education and outreach activities to promote a healthy lifestyle by delivering the tools that place the individual in charge of their own health.
- Involve citizens, particularly minority populations, directly in assessing and addressing health issues.
- Continue development of technology, such as the geographical information systems (GIS), to monitor health-related issues and improve efficiency.

PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS

Fort Worth Public Health Department Programs

- Access to Health Insurance - The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) was enacted by the United States Congress in 1997. The program is designed for families who do not qualify for Medicaid, but cannot comfortably afford commercial insurance. The Outreach staff assist in enrolling citizens by distributing information at malls, churches, schools and in neighborhoods.
- Animal-Related Community Health Problems - The Animal Care and Control Division works daily to promote the importance of responsible pet ownership in solving most animal-related community health problems. The Division enforces animal-related City codes and also has educational programs that address issues such as rabies, animal licensing, animal bites and animal overpopulation.
- Bioterrorism Preparedness - The FWPHD continues to take a lead role in bioterrorism prevention, preparedness and response. The FWPHD receives more than \$495,000 state and national funds annually to restructure and reinforce this responsibility. This money has been used to create a Bioterrorism and Health Emergency Preparedness Team, which is responsible for educating residents about emergency preparedness. The department has also pursued numerous partnerships and established links with an extensive array of emergency response and support services to accommodate the enormity of this task. The FWPHD continues to be involved in regional homeland security and bioterrorism preparation activities in order to optimize the resources available to Fort Worth in the event of an intentional, natural or accidental disaster.

Linking Residents with Needed Services



The Outreach Division works to fill the gaps in health and social services by linking residents with needed services including the CHIP insurance program. (Source: Public Health Department, 2002.)

Protecting Residents from Dangers Posed by Stray Animals



Animal Control Officers make sure that residents are protected from the threats posed by stray and homeless animals and the diseases that they may carry, including rabies. (Source: Public Health Department, 2002.)

- **Child Injury** - The FWPHD has a variety of programs to address the prevention of child injuries. The Car Seat Injury Prevention program educates hundreds of parents and grandparents each year about the dangers of not restraining children in car seats and/or seat belts. FWPHD offers low-cost bicycle helmets to low-income families who may not be able to afford helmets for their children. The Health Promotion and Education Section offers an educational program called, “Water Jeopardy: How Safe is Water?” This program explores necessary water safety tips for children and is an interactive learning session that helps participants identify and eliminate potential water dangers around the house, at a pool or at the lake.
- **Chronic Disease** - The Outreach Division offers a program called “On the Road to Self Management” that targets symptom management of chronic diseases including arthritis, asthma, allergies, cancer, diabetes, heart disease and hypertension. This program is aimed at reducing healthcare costs by educating chronic diseases sufferers on how to manage their symptoms instead of waiting to seek medical care when symptoms become critical. The division also provides educational programs to help residents identify risk factors of diabetes and reduce the onset of symptoms.
- **Food-borne Illnesses** - The FWPHD has an award-winning Consumer Health Program, which was recognized as the best food protection agency in the nation in 2004. The Consumer Health Division inspects and issues permits for a variety of food establishments where good sanitary practices are crucial to preventing disease. To help reduce the on-going threat of food-borne illness, the Consumer Health Division adopted the State’s new food establishment rules, which are focused more on food preparation processes and personal hygiene, which have been identified as the most common causes of food-borne outbreaks.
- **Mental Health Care** - The FWPHD has created a program called Community Solutions, which will establish an accessible, culturally competent and seamless child- and family-driven system of care for families impacted by severe emotional disturbance in Fort Worth. The department is serving as the lead agency, partnering with the Fort Worth Independent School District and the member agencies and individuals of the Mental Health Connection of Tarrant County. It is anticipated that a total of 455 children will be served by 2008, and ramifications of the changes created through this project will be felt across the mental health community for years to come.
- **Mosquito-borne disease** - The FWPHD is monitoring mosquito breeding sites and performing random collection of mosquitoes in an effort to reduce the risk of an outbreak of West Nile virus or St. Louis encephalitis. This is accomplished with help from the Tarrant County Health Department and the Texas Department of Health. Additionally, public education occurs during the season informing citizens of the necessity of personal protection.
- **Nutrition and Obesity** - The Health Promotion and Education Section offers many programs aimed at improving nutrition and fighting obesity in Fort Worth. Such programs include “Let’s Get Active,” aimed at preschool children; “Be Wise, Exercise” and “Heart Power,” aimed at keeping fitness fun for grade school children; “Walk for the Health of It,” an incentive program that rewards

Reaching Out to Residents



The Fort Worth Public Health Department’s Public Outreach division helps assure that residents receive quality health services. (Source: Public Health Department, 2002.)

local walkers, of all ages, for reaching walking milestones; and “Food for Thought,” a program that teaches people of all ages how to overcome nutritional challenges. The Outreach Division offers dozens of educational programs including “Salud Para Su Corazon,” a grassroots effort to bring Hispanic adults and children information they need to improve the heart health and risk of obesity, and “On the trail to Healthy Eating” is a new collaborative program with Minyard’s Food Stores and the Texas A&M Extension Service aimed at helping shoppers make healthy choices when buying food.

- Prenatal Care - The Outreach Division identifies mothers who need prenatal care, refers them to the proper agencies and conducts follow-up meetings to assess whether prenatal care is being administered and utilized properly. The division also provides education to expecting mothers on parenting, exercise and prenatal nutrition in an effort to improve pregnancy outcomes.

In 2006, the City of Fort Worth will begin construction of a new public health center that will be located east of Interstate 35 in the Evans & Rosedale Business and Cultural District. The new health center is estimated to open the fall of 2006 and will be approximately 30,000 square feet. It is estimated that the new building will serve more than 57,000 visitors annually who will come to utilize a host of public health services provided from the department's Consumer Health, Epidemiology, Outreach, Health Promotion and Community Solutions divisions.

- Consumer Health services will include training for food handlers, childcare workers and pool operators, as well as the sale of permits for those applicable facilities/businesses. Mobile food vendor inspections will occur on-site and the building will serve as a base of operations for all consumer health inspector activities with respect to retail food establishments, childcare centers, hotels/motels and public pools.
- Epidemiological services will include the sale of birth and death certificates and the accumulation and evaluation of health data in Fort Worth. This health data will be used to support and drive public health programs and services to address issues and health problems in individual communities and neighborhoods.
- Outreach operations will include community health advocacy based on epidemiological data, resident referral services and wellness and safety education programs.
- Health Promotion activities will include health education programs for local children and adults.
- Community Solutions will function as the foundation for "wrap-around" mental health support services for local school children and their families.

Fort Worth Independent School District Programs

The Fort Worth Independent School District has school-based clinics to deliver health care. The FWPHD works collaboratively with schools and other community agencies to ensure that student health and educational needs are met.

John Peter Smith (JPS) Network

John Peter Smith (JPS) Network presently operates 23 clinics and is overseen by the Tarrant County Hospital District. This is the only hospital in Tarrant County funded by hospital district taxes. JPS provides care on a sliding fee scale, and provides medical care to residents in local homeless shelters.

Educating Residents about Important Health Issues



Health Educators work to teach Fort Worth children and adults about important health issues and how to prevent illness and injury.
(Source: Public Health Department, 2002.)

Tarrant County Public Health Programs

Tarrant County Public Health (TCPH) is a full service health department serving all of Tarrant County. The department's mission is to safeguard the community's health through prevention of disease and injury, promotion of healthy lifestyles, and protection of the public through enforcement of disease control statutes and codes. TCPH offers all of the ten essential services of public health including monitoring the health status of the community; investigating and diagnosing health problems and hazards; informing and educating people regarding health issues; mobilizing partnerships to solve community problems; supporting policies and plans to achieve health goals; enforcing laws and regulations to protect health and safety; linking people to needed personal health services; ensuring a skilled, competent public health workforce; researching and applying innovative solutions; and, evaluating effectiveness, accessibility and quality of health services.

TCPH provides services from 20 locations across Tarrant County including 8 locations in Fort Worth. It provides services to a 33 county region for lab testing and HIV/AIDS planning and administration. Programs include WIC, immunizations, Champions in Health, Travel Health, Epidemiology/disease surveillance, TB and Refugee Health, STD prevention, vector control, lead screening, restaurant inspections including DFW Airport, well and septic system inspections, chronic disease prevention, and public health preparedness.

TCPH has received numerous state and national awards for innovative model practices such as TeenVideofest, TexasSmartscape, screening at the night shelter, the Statewide Public Health Policy Forum, and the West Nile prevention collaborative. It received recognition as one of the first Public Health Ready projects in the nation and subsequently became a regional Advance Practice Center for preparedness.

The TCPH administers the following programs:

- The Environmental Health Division investigates disease outbreaks, conducts food and water safety surveillance and inspects private and county facilities.
- Community Health Promotion provides health education and awareness to other municipalities in Tarrant County.
- Women, Infant and Children (WIC) clinics are centrally located throughout the county, offering nutritional services and immunizations.
- Tarrant County has clinics that treat communicable diseases, including sexually transmitted diseases, hepatitis B and tuberculosis.

Capital Improvement Projects

The capital improvement projects proposed for the next 20 years are listed in Appendices D and E with estimated costs, dates, and funding sources. Three projects totaling \$14.1 million are identified, of which \$3.4 million is unfunded.